

## Minutes

### SACRED HEART REUSE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

The Sacred Heart Reuse Committee ("SHRC") held its sixth meeting on May 21, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. at the Community Center. Members present were: John Davis, Rita Fontes, Ed Keenan and Irene McCarthy.

Henry Katz, former Chairman of the Sharon Board of Selectmen (and member of the BOS for nine years), met with the Committee to provide insight regarding the Town's past efforts to develop the Sacred Heart property. In the 1980s, a proposal to turn the property over to a developer for residential use was rejected at Town Meeting amid concerns over price, water supply and septic/environmental issues. In the 1990s, another committee focusing on space needs within the Town, considered the site as the possible location for a library, Town Hall, or consolidated DPW facility. However, the efforts of this committee proved likewise unsuccessful.

At some point, a study was conducted regarding the feasibility of reusing the existing building. The masonry, Mr. Katz stated, is solid. The building still has "great structural value" and can be used, he said, as a library. Sometime in the 1990s, a gentleman from Wentworth Institute challenged his students (in the nature of a competition) to design a façade for the existing structure. Several students presented mockups at Town Meeting which showed the building redesigned as a consolidated library/senior center/Town Hall facility. Yet many residents were opposed to the notion of relocating the library and/or Town Hall away from the center of Town and, as a result, another opportunity to put the building to a "good municipal use" was "lost." Mr. Katz strongly believes the existing structure should be reused. If it is torn down, it will be very difficult to get another structure built on the site.

Mr. Katz warned that the property is not zoned for commercial or multi-residential use. Thus, depending on the nature of the use proposed by the SHRC, zoning may have to be changed. Any such change will require a two-thirds vote. Mr. Katz does not see that happening. Further, because of the close proximity of the lake and wellhead No. 3, serious environmental issues must also be addressed.

Jane Desberg (Chair) and Warren Kirshenbaum of the Sharon Housing Partnership ("SHP") also addressed the SHRC. They distributed a 10-page document describing, among other things, the background and role of the SHP, as well as the need for more affordable housing in Sharon. Once the Avalon Bay project (156 units) on Norwood Street is complete, a mere 6.3% of the Sharon housing stock will qualify as "affordable." This is still well below the statewide target of 10%. At present, there is only one existing home ownership opportunity in Sharon – the Habitat for Humanity home located at 17 Gunhouse Street. According to the Department of Housing and Community Development, there are currently 220 units of low income housing in Sharon. The Sacred

Heart site provides an opportunity for a "mixed-use type project" that includes affordable housing units. Attorney Kirshenbaum suggests federal tax credit monies may be available to supplement the project for a community in need. The DHCD is also interested in promoting public/private housing partnerships. Ms. Desberg and Attorney Kirshenbaum reported that the Simpson properties on Route 1 (another Chapter 40B project) proposes to add 180+ units, and intends to return to the ZBA for a second time in the near future.

To date, Irene McCarthy has been unable to reach Lou Kafka, but will attempt to meet with him shortly. She will inquire of Representative Kafka regarding the availability of state grant monies for demolition of and/or rehabbing the existing structure. Ms. McCarthy also reports that, according to Superintendent Barbara Dunham, the Sharon School Department has no interest in the Sacred Heart property at this time. A swimming pool would be welcome and, if office space should become available, the School Department may have a need. Presently, the School Administration plans to move to the Middle School, then sell the Administration building on School Street.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:10 p.m.